

Chester Arthur "Howlin Wolf" Burnett

Chester Arthur Burnett was born on a plantation near West Point, Mississippi on June 10, 1910. His family moved to another plantation near Ruleville, Mississippi in 1923. Chester was exposed to music from the nearby churches in early childhood but did not take up the guitar until he was 18 years old. He was introduced to Charlie Patton, a local Bluesman, about this time, who taught Chester the Delta Blues style of guitar.

Chester continued to farm with his family, playing occasionally for local parties until 1933, when his family moved to Parkin, Arkansas. In Parkin, Sonny Boy Williamson, who was married to Chester's sister, taught him to play the harmonica. Chester quit farming and went on the road with Williamson and other blues artists such as Robert Johnson.

Chester was drafted during World War II by the U.S. Army and after he returned from the war he settled in West Memphis, Arkansas. He worked there as a DJ on a local radio station, KWEM and also started his own band. Chester first began calling himself Howling Wolf while working for KWEM.

Howling Wolf was first recorded by Sam Phillips in 1950, (later the owner of Sun Records). Phillips sold the recording to Chess records. Howling Wolf signed with Chess and teamed with Willie Dixon who wrote many of his songs. Dixon also wrote for Muddy Waters. Howling and Muddy became fierce rivals, each trying to outdo the other with the intensity and rawness of their style. In the 1950's if you talked about the Chicago Blues you were talking Muddy and Howling.

Howling Wolf's style was a mixture of gravelly voice, high pitched howls, furious harmonica, and body gyrations. He weighed over 300 pounds and stood six and a half feet tall. His stage presence was both commanding and riveting.

Howling Wolf remained prominent during the wane in popularity of Blues music and during the early 1960s he played with such groups as the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds. In the late 1960s he recorded the London Howling Wolf Sessions with Eric Clapton, and Ringo Starr.

Howling had a heart attack and was involved in a car wreck in the early 1970s and was forced to cut down on his performances. His last performance was in 1975 with B.B. King.

Howling had suffered severe kidney damage during the car accident and on January 10, 1976, he finally succumbed to his chronic kidney problems and passed away in Hines, Illinois.

Howling Wolf was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1980 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1991.

Sources:

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

[Encyclopedia Africana](#)

[Atlanta Music Group \(AMG\)](#)